



Self-portrait, c. 1875-1880 (MNAC)

The painter Antoni Caba i Casamitjana (Barcelona, 1838-1907)

Antoni Caba began his artistic career at the *School of Fine Arts of Barcelona (La Llotja)*, where he had as teachers Gabriel Planella, Pau Milà i Fontanals and Claudio Lorenzale, the last two, representative artists of the catalan Romanticism (*Els Natzarens*), who formed him in Aesthetic theory and History the first, and in Drawing and Painting the second.

Around 1861 he made a painting inspired by the literary work of Lope de Vega *El Acero de Madrid*, one of the eight medallions for the great ceiling at the *Gran Teatre del Liceu*. It was made after the fire that destroyed the barcelonian opera coliseum that same year. As a mural decorator he also made *The Dawn, the Day and the Night* for the ceiling of the house Brusi, as well as *The Time taking the Fortune and Love, but not the Glory* for the ceiling of the palace Mansana, both pictures of uncertain dating.

At that time he also appeared as a literary illustrator: oils and drawings of his –that he signed as *A. Cava*– inspired eleven sheets of the book *Història de Catalunya i la Corona d'Aragó*, written by Víctor

Balaguer (1860-1863), engraved by Roca and Furnó, two of which sheets also were used in *Las calles de Barcelona* (1865), by the same author.



Portrait of the painter Ramon Padró, 1867 (MNAC)

Sponsored by the *Provincial Council of Barcelona*, in 1863 he moved to Madrid, where he studied at the *Especial School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving*. There he became disciple of Federico de Madrazo, and also studied at the workshop of Carlos Luis de Ribera. At the *National Exhibition of Fine Arts* (1864) he won the Second Class Medal with *The Peralada's Heroine*, oil painting acquired by the Spanish government for the then known *National Museum of Paintings*. On 1866 Caba opted for the vacancy of Professor of Elementary Studies at the *Royal Academy of San Fernando*, being outside of the contest in second place.



The Peralada's Heroine, c. 1864 (Museum of Prado/trustee at the City Hall of Peralada)

That same year he went to Paris, entering the *École impériale des beaux-arts*, where he had as teachers Hippolyte Delaroche and especially Marc-Charles Gleyre, representative painter of academicism, as well as a teacher opened to the new airs of realistic modernity of middle XIXth century. It seems that in Paris Caba was related to some relevant painters like Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley, not remaining indifferent to the parisian novelties, which will be evident, in a subtle way, in his brushstroke and atmospheres when he moved to Barcelona, running away ostensibly of the aesthetic dogmatism and ideology of the *Natzarens*.

In 1870 he became a numerary member of the *Provincial Academy of Fine Arts of Barcelona*, and entered as a teacher in *La Llotja*, winning in 1874 the professorship of Color and Composition, in dispute with Simó Gómez Polo. Both artists competed with a pictorial version of the biblical sketch *Jude's repentance at the Sanhedrin* (Royal Catalan Academy of Fine Arts of Sant Jordi (RACBASJ)), that Caba resolved compositionally and chromatically in a more dynamic and daring way than his opponent.



Jude's repentance at the Sanhedrin (fragment), 1874 (RACBASJ)

Caba also participated in the exhibitions of the *Society for Exhibitions of Fine Arts of Barcelona* (1868 and 1873), in the art gallery *José Monter Establishment* (1873 and 1876), in the *Artistic Center of Olot* (1877) and at the *University of Barcelona* (1877); as an illustrator he appeared too in the *Album Monumental de Mallorca* (1873).

Around 1876, in collaboration with his friend Tomàs Padró, he painted the extraordinary oil on canvas *The Peace* (*National Art Museum of Catalunya* (MNAC)), an artwork conceived as a great allegory of the arts and trades that was awarded by the

Provincial Council of Barcelona, and of which some sketches -in pencil and pictorial- remain conserved. He also assumed some important religious orders, such as the *Mare de Déu of Montserrat* for the Abbey of Montserrat (1878) and, later, an image of *St. Thomas Aquinas* (c. 1886), on the occasion of the jubilee of the Pope Leo XIII in 1887.

Caba was present too in the art gallery *Sala Parés* at the first two great exhibitions of fine arts (1884), at the *XIIth Extraordinary of Fine Arts* (1895), at the *Exhibition of paintings and sculptures* (1888), and at the first exhibition of the *Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluç* (1893). He also presented a work at the 1888's *Universal Exposition of Barcelona*, where he won a Gold Medal and was unanimously praised by critics, as well as at the *Ist General Exhibition of Fine Arts of Barcelona* (1891), where he presented seven portraits.

His regular presence in the catalan artistic life also was materialized in his role as a member of the organizing commissions and juries of admission and placement of works in the Barcelona official exhibitions, as for example in the transcendental *IIIrd Exhibition of Fine Arts and Artistic Industries* (1896).

Between 1887 and 1901 became director of *La Llotja*, year in which he left the charge by health problems. Already deceased the 24th of january of 1907, four portraits of Caba were exposed in the *Vth International Exhibition of Fine Arts and Artistic Industries* (1907).

Caba is well represented in the MNAC and in the RACBASJ, where multiple portraits, studies, notes, sketches of historical compositions, etc. are preserved, and is present too in the *Museum of Montserrat* and at the *Museum of Prado*, as its said.



The Four Elements, 1882 (MNAC)

Introducer of pictorial realism in Catalonia together with Ramon Martí i Alsina, Caba incorporated the aesthetic precepts of realism first to academic themes and historical genre, whether it was accurately expressing the textures to be represented, configuring more dynamic compositions, shaping and adding less luminous and artificial atmospheres to the subjects, approaching to a realism next to Gustave Courbet paintings, however Caba never left the inertia of the romanticism in his work.



The little girl of the hoop (fragment), c. 1870 (MNAC)

According to the critic of art Eugeni d'Ors (1923), 'over time, Caba should be the catalan William-Adolphe Bouguereau', although the French painter is closer to the academicism of his time, with a more luminous and classicist painting. Anyhow, Caba was a more unsettled and experimental painter than the french in his whole career.

But was the critic of art Alexandre Cirici-Pellicer (1947) who fixed all the stylistic phases of Antoni Caba -flamigere (1866-1870), neo-greek (1871-1874), silky (1875-1877), anecdotal (1878-1881), hard (1882-1886) and photographic (1887-1900)-, settling with it a tool to make an approach to the study of his work still valid today.

After the stage in Paris, Caba came nearest to the brilliant brushstroke of Franz Hals, but later gave

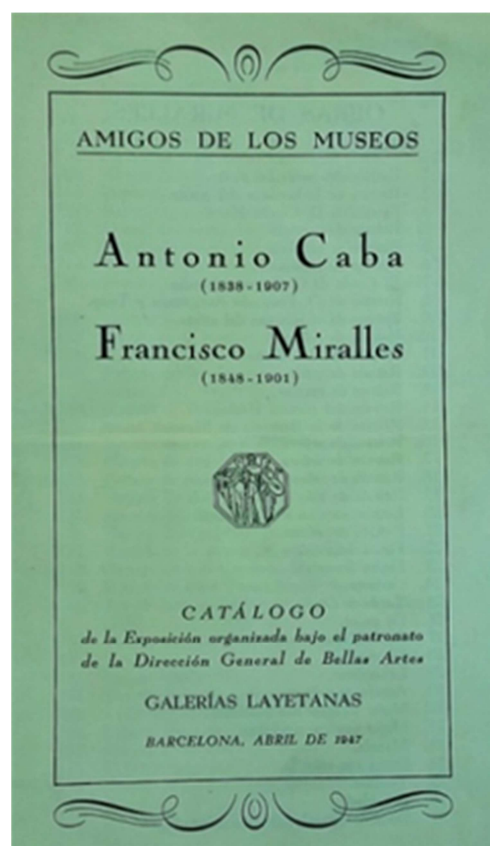
more prominence to the line, with which transcends the pictoric surface and seems to evoke Ingres. After a phase close to the misty paintings of Francesc Masriera or Vicente López, he reached a stage of transition, where he focused in anecdotal subjects, and in which he also made a careful study of the watercolor technique.

But was in the portrait where Caba found an ideal ground to deploy his pictoric achievements based on the effects of the real light and the *chiaroscuro*, offering us a huge production of portraits that reveals his stylistic eclecticism and his pictorial restlessness.



Portrait of a young woman, c. 1885 (MNAC)

In general lines, the portraits of Caba strengthen the faces and fade to black the backgrounds, which is fully evident in the called by Cirici-Pellicer, hard phase, when Caba tried for barely illuminated atmospheres in his workshop, with the light strongly reflected in the subjects's faces, reaching a clear contour painting, in vain brushwork, adding to his work part of the novelties of the new generations of painters like Joan Llimona, Santiago Rusiñol, Dionís Baixeras or Ramon Casas, to which he was generally receptive.



Catalogue of the exhibition Caba-Miralles (Barcelona, 1947)

In the final stage, practicing some kind of photographic realism, Caba seems to surrender to the taste of the bourgeois clients, already pleased with the maximum similitude of the paintings to reality, and in which increases the chromatic range in relation to his previous stage.

Caba's desire to transcend the canvas with the characters and their personalities is clearly manifested in their eyes, wide open, sparkling, alive and profiled, approaching the viewer in a direct way, as if their mute presence could break the pictoric surface with their strong sight.

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SELECTED ARTWORKS OF CABA:

OIL PAINTINGS: Sketch for *El Acero de Madrid*, c. 1861; *The Tribute of Caesar (Gospel of St. Matthew: Chapter 22)*, 1863; *Portrait of the painter Ramón Amado*, 1864; *Portrait of Carolina Abarca*, 1866; Copy of Velazquez, *Prince Baltasar Carlos*, 1866; *Portrait of the painter Ramón Padró*, 1867; *Portrait of the painter Tomás Padró*, 1867; *Portrait of the painter Joaquim Vayreda*, 1870; *The little girl of the hoop*, c. 1870; *Portrait of Maria Martorell Peña*, c. 1872; *Portrait of Maria Ana Martorell de Bofill*, c. 1872; *Portrait of Jules Ainaud i Escudé*, 1872; *Jude's Repentance at the Sanhedrin*, 1874; *Portrait of Consuelo Barret y Carafí*, c. 1875; *Portrait of Flora Serra de Bertrand*, c. 1875; *The Peace*, c. 1876; *Portrait of Frederic Oliveras*, 1876; *Portrait of Maria Moret d'Oliveras*, c. 1876; *Portrait of Narcís Oliveras Rosales*, 1877; *Purísima Concepción*, c. 1877; *Portrait of children Lluís, Joan and Marià Serrahima Camín*, 1878; *Portrait of Ana Palá de Serrahima*, c. 1878; *Mare de Déu of Montserrat*, 1878; *Portrait of Angela del Monte*, c. 1880; *Portrait of Enriqueta Oliveras Rosales*, 1880; *Portrait of Lluïsa Dulce i Tresserra, marchioness of Castellflorite*, c. 1880; *The Four Elements*, 1882; *Portrait of Alejo Vidal Quadras*, c. 1884; *Portrait of Hermenegildo Martí y Ferrer*, c. 1884; *Portrait of the marquis of Alfarràs*, c. 1884; *Portrait of the King Alfonso XII*, 1885; *Portrait of a young woman*, c. 1885; *St. Thomas Aquinas*, c. 1886; *Portrait of Dolores Monserdá*, c. 1888; *Portrait of Beatriu Vidal de Monserdá*, 1890; *Portrait of Queen Maria Cristina d'Habsburg-Lorraine and her son Alfonso XIII*, 1890; *Portrait of Claudi Lorenzale*, 1891; *Portrait of Manuel Duran i Bas*, 1893; *Portrait of Maurici Serrahima i Palà*, 1896; *The Dawn, the Day and the Night*, n.d.; *Allegory of Time, Fortune and Love/The Time taking the Fortune and Love, but not the Glory*, n.d.; *The mother of the Gracos*, n.d.; *Portrait of Matilde Buxó de Caba, wife of the painter*, n.d.

DRAWINGS & LITERARY ILLUSTRATION: Study for *El Acero de Madrid, with Belisa and Lisandro in loving attitude*, c. 1861; *Bernardo Conde de Barcelona murdered by Carlos el Calvo*, 1860-1863; *D. Jaime the Conqueror*, 1860-1863; *Oath of D. Jaime in the Puig de Santa Maria*, 1860-1863; *Roger de Lauria*, 1860-1863; *Pere el Gran at the Coll de Panisars*, 1860-1863; *Ramon Llull*, 1860-1863; *Juan Fivaller*, 1860-1863; *Act of reception of Pablo de Altarriba Chancellor of Barcelona in the Court of Felipe IV*, 1860-1863; *The feast of St. Pau in Barcelona at the end of the eighteenth century*, 1860-1863; *The Boqueria of Barcelona in 1802*, 1860-1863; *A scene of popular customs*, 1860-1863; Study of the natural for *The Peace*, c. 1876-77; *Troubadour*, n.d.

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